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LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL TRICKS IN MANIPULATIVE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Political discourse defined by linguists as persuasive discourse effectively employs the ability of language to communicate and give shape to reality. Socrates and Aristotle were well aware of the power of language to distort perception and influence behavior, and thus be a tool, or weapon, for achieving the speaker's goals. Based on principles worked out by Classical rhetoricians modern rhetoric is revived on a new basis synthesizing theoretical data of pragmatics, psycholinguistics and communication theory. As a result, the emphasis is laid not upon sharing knowledge but rather upon forming the opinion. Language of politics nowadays tends to be ambiguous, indefinite and vague. Political discourse provides contexts in which the speaker doesn't mean exactly what the words literally mean. That is, the speaker's denotation differs from the semantic meaning. Political discourse defined by linguists as persuasive discourse effectively employs the gift of language to communicate and give profile to reality. Politicians use a wide range of language means to manipulate the electorate: euphemisms, jargon, gobbledegook, inflated language, simplified or overcomplicated syntax. Politics seems to be the realm of doublespeak which is presented as a heterogeneous phenomenon providing cloudy vagueness of political language. The influence on addressee's perception is conveyed due to manipulative potential of language. The enormous power is in the meaning of the words, what they mean to the human being who hears them. Far more than simple communication, truth, falsehood and the infinite shades between them, words have the power to manipulate other people's thinking and behavior. On grammatical level one of the characteristic traits of political discourse (especially political slogans) is the use of verbless sentences. Verbless sentences in the English language may be viewed in the context of nominalization trend. It must be noted that verbless sentences in the analytical English language break all grammatical norms. Hence designed to mislead, Doublespeak is presented as a heterogeneous phenomenon providing cloudy vagueness of political language.

Key words: *political discourse, doublespeak, euphemisms, simplified or overcomplicated syntax, verbless sentences, nominalization.*

ЛЕКСИКО-ГРАМАТИЧНІ ПРИЙОМИ В МАНІПУЛЯТИВНОМУ ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

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Політичний дискурс, визначений мовознавцями як дискурс переконання, ефективно використовує здатність мови спілкуватися та формувати уявлення про реальність. Сократ та Аристотель добре усвідомлювали силу мови спотворювати сприйняття та впливати на поведінку, а отже, бути інструментом чи зброєю для досягнення цілей мовця. На основі принципів, вироблених класичними риториками, сучасна риторика відроджується на новій основі, синтезуючи теоретичні дані прагматики, психолінгвістики та теорії комунікації. Як результат, акцент робиться не на обміні знаннями, а на формуванні відповідної думки та поглядів. Мова політики в наш час має тенденцію бути неоднозначною, невизначеною та розмитою. Політичний дискурс вводить контексти, в яких оратор не має на увазі саме те, що буквалью означають слова. Тобто денотат мовця відрізняється від семантичного значення. Політичний дискурс, визначений лінгвістами як персуазивний, ефективно застосовує дар мови спілкуватися та впливати на свідомість слухачів. Політики використовують широкий спектр мовних засобів для маніпулювання електоратом: евфемізми, жаргонізми, спрощений або ускладнений синтаксис. Політика здається цариною подвійної мови, яка подається як різномірне явище, що забезпечує невизначеність мови політики. Вплив на сприйняття адресата передається завдяки маніпулятивному потенціалу мови. Велике значення має семантика слів, те, що вони означають для людини, яка їх чує. Слова на позначення правди, брехні мають силу маніпулювати мисленням та поведінкою інших людей. На граматичному рівні однією з характерних рис політичного дискурсу (особливо політичних гасел) є використання бездієслівних речень. Бездієслівні речення



в англійській мові можна розглядати в контексті тенденції номіналізації. Слід зазначити, що бездієслівні речення в аналітичній англійській мові порушують усі граматичні норми. Отже, розроблена для введення в оману, подвійна мова представлена як неоднорідне явище, що забезпечує невизначеність мови політики.

Ключові слова: політичний дискурс, евфемізми, спрощений і ускладнений синтаксис, бездієслівні речення, номіналізація.

1. Introduction

Language is a guide and channel to social reality and it effectively conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Hence, it is a tool, one of many human tools, with which we have developed society and built civilization. However, like any other instrument, language can be abused, used not to communicate but to confuse, not to elucidate but to obscure, not to lead but mislead. "Speech is granted to people to conceal their thoughts" is a well-known announcement attributed to Charles Maurice Talleyrand. In reality these words are evidently confirmed by a broad range of professions (journalists, brokers, lawyers, doctors, diplomats and politicians), the representatives of which due to diverse pragmatic factors have to resort to indirect, implicit meanings.

Language of politics nowadays tends to be ambiguous, indefinite and vague. Political discourse provides contexts in which the speaker doesn't mean exactly what the words literally mean. That is, the speaker's denotation differs from the semantic meaning. Political discourse defined by linguists as persuasive discourse (Lakoff, 1982: 27) effectively employs the gift of language to communicate and give profile to reality. As a conceptual design used to organize our thoughts language shapes our reactions to people, events, and ideas.

The beginning of anthropocentric paradigm is accompanied by the careful attention of linguists to the study of meaning interpretation, the examination of what people mean by their utterances in a particular context and how the context influences what is said, as well as how listeners make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's planned meaning. These subjects that the linguists are concerned with promote efficient interaction in the process of communication.

Present-day studies of the effective interaction strategies originate from the rhetoric of ancient Greece, the so-called art of persuasion resting upon the principles of logical reasoning. Based on principles worked out by Classical rhetoricians modern rhetoric is revived on a new basis synthesizing theoretical data of pragmatics, psycholinguistics and communication theory. As a result, the emphasis is laid not upon sharing

knowledge but rather upon forming the opinion. The influence on addressee's perception is conveyed due to manipulative potential of language.

2. Lexical means of manipulation in political discourse

This enormous power is in the meaning of the words, what they mean to the human being who hears them. Far more than simple communication, truth, falsehood and the infinite shades between them, words have the power to manipulate other people's thinking and behavior.

In addition, the choice of language means is always motivated and never arbitrary (Blakar, 1979: 145). Yet, people in the majority of cases do not conceive of politicians' statements as being at variance with their purported meaning and assume their accounts as being obvious truth (Fowler, 1991: 126). Thereby politicians intend for the addressees to be affected in a certain way that they can benefit from while the addressee perceives the suggested interpretation of the situation as the only possible one.

Nowadays the intention not to lose face, win social support from addressees and control the situation in the process of communication leads to wide use of the manipulative potential of language. Socrates and Aristotle were well aware of the power of language to distort perception and influence behavior, and thus be a tool, or weapon, for achieving the speaker's objectives.

As a result, uncertainty and evasiveness have become an essential part of politicians' communicative behaviour. Politics seems to be the realm of Doublespeak, language which is at variance with its real or its purported meaning.

The word Doublespeak combines the meanings of Newspeak (the official language and the means of control in the world of George Orwell's novel "1984") and doublethink ("the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them") (Orwell, 2011).

As William Lutz points out, "Doublespeak is language which pretends to communicate but really does not. It is language which makes the bad seem good, something negative appear positive, something unpleasant appear attractive, or at least tolerable. It is language which

avoids or shifts responsibility; language which is at variance with its real and its purported meaning; language which conceals or prevents thought. Doublespeak is language which does not extend thought but limits it" (Lutz, 1990: 5).

George Orwell's novel warning about the alarming consequences failed to eradicate doublespeak that is flourishing and penetrating into all spheres of life. We view advertisements for *previously distinguished cars* (not used cars), for *genuine imitation leather*, or *real counterfeit diamonds*. There are no slums or ghettos just *the inner city* or *sub-standard housing* where *the disadvantaged* or *economically nonaffluent* live. Nonprofit organizations don't make a profit, they have *negative deficits* or they *experience revenue excesses*. Even robbery can be magically transformed with doublespeak, as a bank in Texas did when it declared a robbery of an ATM to be *an authorized transaction*. There is no more dying in the world of doublespeak. Now it is qualified as *terminal living*.

Hence doublespeak has become an adapted form of communication seemingly highlighting many aspects but in fact misleading them. Verbal tricks lessen and "eliminate" all that is considered to be socially incorrect. Politicians use a wide range of language means to manipulate and influence the electorate.

Designed to misinform, doublespeak is somewhat heterogeneous phenomenon that complicates the procedure of its comprehensive classification. Its most thorough classification is presented by William Lutz who singles out the following forms of doublespeak:

1) Euphemism that serves as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, used in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party (Keith, 2007: 3). When, according to W. Lutz, a euphemism is used out of concern for a social or cultural taboo, it is not doublespeak. For example, we express grief that someone has *passed away* because we do not want to say to a grieving person, "I'm sorry your father is dead". The euphemism *passed away* functions here not just to protect the feelings of another person but also to communicate our concern over that person's feelings during a period of mourning. In the same way rules of politeness prescribe to give preference to such euphemisms as *heavily built*, *big boned*, *classic proportion*, *maturer figure* rather than mentioning the actual degree of a person's obesity. In this case euphemisms help to avoid negative emotions in interaction.

However, when the speaker intends to mislead or deceive and make the course of events beneficial for oneself, a euphemism becomes doublespeak. For example, the U.S. State Department decided in 1984 that in its annual reports it would no longer use the word *killing*. Instead, it used the phrase *unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life*. Thus, the State Department avoids discussing the embarrassing situation of the government sanctioned killings in countries that are supported by the United States. Notably war is called *incident*, invasion turns into *rescue mission* or *peace-keeping action*, civilian casualties – *collateral damage*.

It is worthy to mention that the use of such euphemisms is not restricted to the language of politics. They are widely used in everyday life – *negative patient care outcome* (= death of a patient in a hospital), *water landing* (= airplane crash in the sea) to name just a few. However, genuine euphemism doesn't mislead but must call up the word it stands for (Galperin, 1981: 175). Whereas, this use of language constitutes doublespeak as it's designed to alter perception of reality and cover up the unpleasant.

2) Jargon is the specialized language of a professional or social group of people designed for exclusive use of the group members that distinguishes them from the outsiders. It serves as effective means of communication within a group but appears to be incomprehensible for the outsiders. For example, lawyers speak of an *involuntary conversion of property* when discussing the loss or *destruction of property through theft, accident, or condemnation*. A legitimate use of language among lawyers it becomes doublespeak if used intentionally among people who are not familiar with legal jargon.

3) Gobbledygook or bureaucratese is realized by piling on words and is aimed at overwhelming the audience with words, the bigger the better. For example, when Alan Greenspan was chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, he made this statement when testifying before a Senate committee: *It is a tricky problem to find the particular calibration in timing that would be appropriate to stem the acceleration in risk premiums created by falling incomes without prematurely aborting the decline in the inflation-generated risk premiums*. Perhaps there is some meaning beneath all those words, but it would take some time to search it out. This seems to be language that pretends to communicate but does not.

4) Inflated language designed to make the ordinary seem extraordinary, to make



everyday things seem impressive; to give an air of importance to people, situations, or things that would not normally be considered important. With this kind of language, car mechanics become *automotive internists*, elevator operators become *members of the vertical transportation corps*, used cars become *experienced cars*, alcoholics become *victims of habitually detrimental lifestyle* and the process of smelling something – *organoleptic analysis*. On the one hand, these examples of renaming seem to be humorous, harmless and innocuous. On the other hand, each word is carefully chosen, with its particular nuances and shades of meaning, to fulfill the mission of the speaker. Words are incredibly powerful in shaping our perceptions about issues and, as W. Lutz puts it, “doublespeak is insidious because it can infect and eventually destroy the function of language, which is communication between people and social groups” (Lutz, 1990: 17).

3. Grammatical means of manipulation in political discourse

On grammatical level one of the characteristic traits of political discourse (especially political slogans) is the use of verbless sentences. Verbless sentences in the English language may be viewed in the context of nominalization trend. It must be noted that verbless sentences in the analytical English language break all grammatical norms.

Verbless sentences for the analytical English language with fixed word order and the mandatory presence of the subject and predicate is a serious deviation from the grammatical rules, they stand out from the rest of the text. They are stylistically marked and used in emotional speech.

Abundance of verbless sentences creates the impression of: ignorance and illiteracy (a style often called *Tarzan talk* (1) after the comic book hero who grew up in the jungle), or language incompetence characteristic of children (*baby talk*) and foreigners (*foreign talk*) (2) (Ferguson, 1971).

(1) *Me Tarzan, you Jane.*

(2) *Charlie bath hot.*

The structural core of a verbless sentence is a noun in the Nominative or Objective case. Verbless sentence formed by a noun in the Nominative case is understood to have a paradigmatic predication, verbless sentence formed by a noun in the Objective case is understood to have a syntagmatic predication.

Widespread use of verbless sentences in political discourse has drawn criticism not only from grammarians, defenders of “pure language” but from philosophers, journalists and writers.

Some scholars foretold the imminent decline and decay of political language. They saw its signs in the undue preference for passive voice over active voice, the tendency to use semi-notional verbs, the wide use of verbal nouns and nominalizations (Orwell, 2011).

In the 21st century this forecast came true in many languages leading to creation of a dysfunctional narrative. This refers to the intentional vagueness and inconsistency of the political narrative. Political commentators in Britain readily notice inclination of modern politicians to use verbless sentences: *Blairite verbless sentence; you can tell a real Blairite because they use verb-free sentences; to talk like a Blairite*. S. Hoggart mocks the prevalent style of the modern political narrative: “*For too long, the Party’s energy wasted. On verbs. For the British people, now, no more verbs. Tough on verbs, tough on the causes of verbs*” (Hoggart, 2004).

Unfortunately the verbless tendency in public speeches became fashionable not only in the English-speaking countries. After the “failure of verbs” many speechwriters obviously decided that they had invented a winning rhetoric and “*every verb torn out is another seat gained*” (Hoggart, 2004).

In English sentence the finite verb possesses predicative categories of modality, time and person, thus it binds the content of the sentence to reality being the center of predication. Since finite verbs “embed” sentences into reality politicians prefer to avoid them and use verbless sentences because they are non-binding and do not commit to anything.

According to some commentators verbless style is a threat to political discourse as it contributes to the degradation of democracy. The essence of democracy is a living dialogue between different parties and the Newspeak “kills” free discussion. Verbless statements can not be disputed since they contain no action, no actors, and, therefore, no conflict, no reason for a dispute. How can we challenge the following statement: *Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Reform of the criminal justice system. A comprehensive programme to deal with juvenile offending; action to tackle drug abuse; proper treatment of victims and witnesses.*

The above statement does not give voters a clear picture of what the future policy on crime will be like. A lot is named but nothing concrete is claimed. In fact this statement does not pledge or commit to anything it is simply a statement of vague intentions.

The effect of verbless political speeches is not achieved on the strength of its content, it is a triumph of style over substance. If you analyze speeches of modern politicians it becomes obvious that they are not more than a collection of meaningless, verbless slogans.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared in one of his speeches: *Business enhanced. Life more entertaining. Public services improved. People better off.*

Strong pathetic charge inherent in verbless sentences "smooths" the absurdity of the remarks like *Life more entertaining*. Imagine a politician who promises to voters: *I promise your life will be more entertaining.*

Since the main structural feature of a sentence is predication we suggest to classify verbless sentences according to the character of their predication. We distinguish between two types of verbless sentences: 1) with paradigmatic predication, 2) with syntagmatic predication.

1. Verbless sentences with paradigmatic predication are one-member nominal constructions with a noun in the Nominative case as its syntactic core. They do not require or permit to fill the verbal component. They are devoid of explicit markers of predicative categories. Meaning of predicative categories of modality and tense is established from their context. Cf.:

Jobs. Growth.

Unity. Solidarity. Partnership.

Decent people. Good people. Patriotic people.

Modern politicians give public speeches not in order to provide new information or clarify their program, for them language is a means of manipulating the electorate. It is widely accepted that the so-called *feel good approach*, i.e. using words that evoke positive associations (*unity, decent, good, growth, honesty*), works better than logical persuasions. Endless repetition of words with positive connotations produces desired effect on any audience.

2. Syntagmatic predication is found in two subtypes of verbless sentences: a) a one-member nominal construction; b) a two-member nominal construction. Meaning of predicative categories of modality and tense is established from their context.

Syntagmatic predication of the first type contains a noun in the Objective case as its syntactic core. Cf.:

New Labour was born then. Of the courage of one man.

Where it is right, we will co-operate as well as oppose. On constitutional change. On Northern Ireland.

In written speech such sentences are usually formed by fragmenting of homogeneous parts of the sentence. Feeling of alienation, dissociation and disintegration of the modern society has led to general cultural phenomenon of fragmentation and break-up in painting (Cubists, Surrealists), poetry, prose (stream of consciousness). In oral speech homogeneous parts of the sentence are pronounced with enumerating intonation, thus making it difficult to put logical stress on each member of the homogeneous chain. That is why homogeneous parts of the sentence are often marked out as separate sentences. As the distance from the predicative center grows, grammatical and notional independence of the fragmented sentences increases. Cf.:

But I believe in it and I want to tell you why. Socialism for me was never about nationalisation or the power of the State. Not just about economics or even politics.

It is a moral purpose to life. A set of values. A belief in society. In co-operation.

Syntagmatic predication of the second type contains two syntactical components that can be completed with a copula verb *to be*. Cf.:

A nation reborn.

European businesses finalising a deal with the Japanese.

Drugs, violence, youngsters hanging around street corners with nothing to do.

It is difficult to determine the temporal characteristics of verbless sentences. Traditionally it is believed that paradigmatic predication implies present tense as such sentences assert existence of an object. It should be noted that sentences with paradigmatic predication enable to show promises for the future as already existing in the present.

In syntagmatic predication with two syntactical components the missing verb is restored in accordance with the general temporal plan or communicative goal. Cf.:

We have transformed our Party. Our constitution re-written. Our relations with the Trade Unions changed. Our Party organisation improved.

Your family better off.

It is assumed that the voter will intuitively restore a missing copula in the future tense. *Your family [will be] better off.* The unsaid creates the illusion and the feeling of intimacy, simplicity and trust but in fact it is a carefully thought-out move. For a sarcastic listener the following variants are possible as well: *Your family was better off; Your family will not not be better off; Your family is be better off;*



Your family is not better off. Compare how much more definite and certain would the following phrase sound: *We will make your family better off.* But such a statement would mean taking on certain obligations which is not the intention of politicians.

In literary texts verbless sentences create tension and density because of their brevity. In a public speech however the same verbless sentences become meaningless jumble of words and add a feeling of inactivity, inertia, apathy. Cf.:

No more bosses versus workers, but partnership at work. No more public versus private finance. Co-operation to rebuild our nation's road, rail, inner cities and regions. No more boom and bust economics. Stability which businesses need to plan for the future. Help for small businesses. A new relationship between public and private sector to rebuild infrastructure. Measures to encourage long term investment.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, modern political narrative tends to be ambiguous, non-transparent and evasive. Political discourse provides contexts in which words happen to mean things they never meant before. Politics seems to be the realm of Doublespeak, which abounds with lexical and grammatical ploys. Amazingly, it originates not from carelessness but is actually the result of clear thinking.

The influence on addressee's perception is conveyed due to manipulative potential of language. Politicians use a wide range of language means to manipulate the electorate: euphemisms, jargon, gobbledygook or bureaucratese, inflated language, simplified or overcomplicated syntax. Hence designed to mislead, Doublespeak is presented as a heterogeneous phenomenon providing cloudy vagueness of political language.

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